

## OBSERVING MEMORIAL DAY

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Southwest Virginia is home to thousands of veterans whose sacrifices and service deserve our recognition this Memorial Day. Our veterans deserve the highest level of treatment and respect from the federal government, and I am firmly committed to ensuring that those who served our nation during times of war have access to the government services they deserve.

Recently, we have made great strides in ensuring that veterans in the Ninth Congressional District have convenient access to high quality health care services. I have worked successfully with the Department of Veterans Affairs to open several new community-based outpatient clinics in the Ninth District. The clinics are located in Bristol, Norton, Marion, Jonesville and Vansant. These are operated by the VA Medical Center in Johnson City, Tennessee. Additionally, a new clinic will soon be located in Wytheville.

The Veterans Administration maintains hospitals in Salem, Virginia and in Johnson City, Tennessee. The medical services provided through these hospitals are convenient for those Ninth District residents who reside within a short distance of one of the hospitals; however, for thousands of Ninth District veterans, a drive to one of the VA hospitals is anything but convenient. For residents in some portions of Southwest Virginia the drive to and from a VA hospital can consume the better part of a day. The provision of primary care to veterans in our outpatient clinics greatly enhances the ease with which our region's veterans can receive medical care.

Additionally, I have long made it a goal to place a veterans cemetery in the Ninth Congressional District so that we can properly honor the Southwest Virginians who have served our nation in uniform. Currently, our region does not have a veterans cemetery, and the nearest veterans

cemetery to our region is located in the Eastern part of Virginia. Under long standing practice, the federal government finances the acquisition of the land and the construction of veterans cemeteries, and the states operate them once they are constructed. We are following that practice in the effort to build a 9<sup>th</sup> District cemetery for veterans.

At my urging, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has awarded a federal grant of \$7,218,366 to the Commonwealth of Virginia to enable the construction of Southwest Virginia's first veterans cemetery near Dublin. The first phase of the cemetery will consist of 24 acres and is expected to meet the needs of the region's veterans for the coming decade.

In the Fall of 2006 we took the first step toward achieving that goal, when the U. S. Congress passed legislation I introduced committing the federal government to the project and directing the U. S. Army to convey 79.8 acres of federally owned land to the Commonwealth of Virginia for the purpose of establishing the region's first veterans cemetery.

With the award of the federal grant, construction has now begun, and the cemetery will be open next year. When completed, Southwest Virginia's veterans cemetery will provide burial opportunities for 60,000 veterans and their families from across the region.

Veterans who have a desire to be buried in the cemetery may submit a pre-application for approval for interment. For more information or to obtain a pre-application for interment, please contact my Pulaski constituent service office at 540-980-4310.

This Memorial Day, there are many ways to pay proper tribute to veterans in our area and the fallen soldiers of our country. As May 31, 2010 approaches, I encourage all Southwest Virginia residents to set aside time to appropriately honor our nation's veterans and the men and women whose sacrifices have enabled the preservation of freedom in our time.

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